

Federal Communications Commission

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In the Matter of

Rulemaking To Amend Part 1
and Part 21 of the Commission's
Rules to Redesignate the 27.5-
29.5 GHz Frequency Band and to
Establish Rules and Policies for
Local Multipoint Distribution Service

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

CC Docket No. 92-297

To: The Commission

**COMMENTS OF
METROCOM TELECASTING**

Metrocom Telecasting ("Metrocom") hereby submits its comments in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the captioned proceeding, released January 8, 1993. Metrocom's principals are actively involved in the MMDS and LPTV areas. As one of the original applicants for 28 GHz spectrum, Metrocom has monitored developments in the LMDS arena very carefully over the last two years and believes this new industry holds tremendous promise. With the recommendations offered below, we endorse the Commission's adoption of the proposed LMDS rules.

I. Technical Issues

In the NPRM, the FCC recognized the virtue of a flexible structure for technical standards for deployment of 28 GHz systems, in light of the variety of distinct services which are envisaged for operation in this spectrum. NPRM at Para. 23-24. Metrocom endorses the Commission's view that "only limited technical regulations may be needed to insure adequate interference control and coordination of services at the

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interfaces of the designated service areas." Id.

However, the text of the proposed rule on this point, Section 21.1012-Spectrum Utilization, does not reflect the technical flexibility recommended in the NPRM itself. Proposed Section 21.1012 would require that applications "contain detailed

specific frequency stability characteristics the applicant will utilize.

Interference between adjacent service areas should not be a problem given the strong signal capture effect which either FM or digital signals exhibit. A 20 dB differential in signal levels will be sufficient to eliminate harmful levels of electrical interference to adjacent service areas. Thus, adjacent area interference control should be based upon a 20 dB desired-undesired signal ratio. This margin should be achievable consistently as long as licensees ensure that their customers' receive antennas are directionalized and properly adjusted.

Finally, because 28 GHz systems will be built at different rates from one service area to another, licensees should be required to demonstrate a minimum of 20 dB desired-undesired signal ratio to theoretical receive sites in adjacent area systems prior to construction of any cell with five miles of the borders of such service areas. This requirement will ensure that no prohibitive interference is caused to operational adjacent area systems.

II. Service Areas

Metrocom has serious reservations about the wisdom of the Basic Trading Area format proposed in the NPRM. In any number of major metropolitan areas -- San Francisco and Los Angeles, to mention only two -- the BTA envelopes an enormous population, larger even than the Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas in which those markets are located. For example, the Los Angeles

BTA encompasses approximately 14.8 million people and extends all the way to the Arizona border. Under the proposed 90 percent coverage requirement, the Los Angeles licensee would have to be capable of serving a population of 13.3 million within three years. To require that a single licensee serve such a populous area within such a brief frame of time may be fundamentally impractical.

In more sparsely populated regions of the country, such as the west and northwest where one BTA can cover many thousands of square miles, the practical limitations of the LMDS cellular configuration are even more obvious. For example, the Billings, Montana and Reno, Nevada BTAs each cover in excess of 100,000 square miles. Nor are the major concentrations of people necessarily within the primary metropolitan area. In the case of Billings, for instance, the population of the entire county is less than 25 percent of the overall population of the BTA.

In short, under a BTA format and depending upon the service area, either (1) a licensee simply may not be able to underwrite the cost of building out 90 percent of the BTA and thus expose itself to loss of its license, or (2) if the 90 percent construction requirement is relaxed, substantial sectors of the BTA may go unserved.

Thus, in the event that the Commission were to adopt the BTA

much more realistic schedule would be 25 percent coverage within three years and 50 percent coverage within five years. Second, given the expansiveness of many BTAs, the Commission should provide that regions unserved by an LMDS operator after five years be opened for additional applications.

Although the BTA concept could be workable if modified in these ways, the preferable course in Metrocom's view is to model LMDS service areas roughly on the approach utilized in the cellular service. However, in order to eliminate the complexity of licensee-defined service areas, we recommend that service areas be delimited in the familiar terms of MSAs, PMSAs and RSAs. This would satisfy the Commission's concern that all land area within the United States be encompassed. NPRM at Para. 30. In virtually all cases, MSAs and PMSAs are more manageable from an operations vantage than are BTAs, and, at the same time, represent clusters of commercial activity denoted by BTAs.

III. Application Requirements

In the NPRM the Commission proposes a "letter perfect" standard for acceptance of LMDS applications, or, alternatively, the "post-card" method akin to the approach now utilized in IVDS application processing. Metrocom urges the Commission to adopt the "letter perfect" standard. This would eliminate the considerable administrative burden existing under current Part 21 rules where only substantial compliance is required for acceptability. On this score, the FCC's experience with the "letter perfect" approach in, for example, the FM radio service,

has confirmed its virtue for processing purposes. By contrast, Metrocom believes that the "post-card" format has the potential for significant abuse by application mills, given the FCC's concomitant proposal to permit tentative selectees up to thirty days to submit a complete proposal once their applications are selected for processing.

In this connection, the one-calendar-day filing opportunity proposed in the NPRM may or may not be appropriate depending upon the application requirements the Commission ultimately adopts. For example, if a thirty day public notice were issued announcing the opening of an LMDS filing window in twenty-five markets, such a schedule might fairly be accommodated if the "post-card" method were in place, but would be burdensome if full-blown, "letter perfect" applications were required to be filed on the date the window opened. On balance, Metrocom believes that the benefit to be gained by requiring "letter-perfect" applications to be submitted at the threshold -- discouraging, at least to some extent, the pervasive speculation that the "post-card" method would breed -- outweighs the efficiency in processing which is the "post-card" method's only virtue. While administrative efficiency is an important objective, it is more important that LMDS tentative selectees be entities which are not speculating

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IV. Demonstration of Financial Qualifications

Metrocom endorses the "firm financial commitment" approach proposed in the NPRM. Along with other measures outlined in the NPRM, this will be an additional protection against the abuses available when an applicant is required only to certify reasonable assurance of financing. It is commonly recognized that bank letters purportedly conveying "reasonable assurance", as a practical matter, give the Commission little confidence that the subject funds are genuinely available. For this reason, it is not surprising that other services administered by the FCC have also abandoned the reasonable assurance concept in favor of the more reliable firm financial commitment requirement.

We note an error, however, in the phrasing of the proposed rule itself (Section 21. 1011). Subparagraph (c) of the rule states that applicants relying upon non-institutional funding must submit proof that the financing entity has not committed the funds in question to any other LMDS application. We presume the FCC intends this restriction to preclude an applicant's relying on the same committed funds for applications in more than one market. It is easily conceivable that one lender may be willing to make its funds available to whomever the tentative selectee is in a given market, meaning that commitment letters may issue to more than one application in a single market. Proposed Section 21.1011 should be corrected accordingly.

A similar clarification should be made to the phrasing of proposed Section 21.1010, governing interests in LMDS

applications. Read literally, the rule would prohibit an entity from holding an interest in LMDS applications in *different* markets. We are aware of no public interest-related concern which the rule in that form might have been intended to address. Indeed, that rendering of the rule is directly at odds with the FCC's discussion at Paragraph 45 of the NPRM. Accordingly, the rule should be clarified to provide that an entity must not

restricted to cases where the cable company is not the dominant deliverer of video programming in the market in question.

VI. Miscellaneous Recommendations

License Terms. It is our view that the five year license term proposed in the NPRM is too short. Considering the significant capital investment which will be required to build and launch a new LMDS system, we are concerned that lenders will be reluctant to provide financing at adequate levels without an assurance that the initial license term is long enough to enable a new LMDS venture to become a going concern. A license term of ten years, identical to the term accorded other Part 21 licensees, would be more appropriate.

Auctions. Although the Commission has expressed interest in the prospect of obtaining auction authority to implement the LMDS service, we believe auctions would be a mistake. More than any technology to come along in years, LMDS holds the potential for varied and distinct applications which will be, in the end, a function principally of the ingenuity of LMDS licensees. The creative possibilities for uses of this technology are too important to deprive smaller LMDS aspirants the opportunity to bring good ideas to fruition merely because they lack the financial wherewithal to bid competitively for an LMDS license. Whatever other services may be well suited for the auction approach, LMDS is not one of them. We therefore recommend that auction authority not be sought in connection with this service.

VII. Conclusion

Metrocom applauds the Commission's efforts to launch the LMDS industry expeditiously. We believe that LMDS holds tremendous promise for bringing rapidly evolving technology to consumers in very short order. Modified to incorporate the changes recommended herein, the new rules will facilitate the development of this industry and should be adopted quickly.

Respectfully submitted,

METROCOM TELECASTING

By: Ronald D. Maines
Ronald D. Maines